

## Evaluation FAQ

How can I evaluate the impact of my ICE initiative?

Once an ICE initiative has been established, you should consider evaluation methods that measure the impact that the program is having on the students. This information will help stakeholders- families, transition and IEP team members, and program staff- to understand the impact that these initiatives have on student outcomes. It will also help program staff make decisions based on student outcomes.

This section will describe how programs should evaluate both programmatic and student outcomes. An emphasis will be on methods for evaluating student outcomes and then what to do with those outcomes.

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### **What is evaluation and why do we use it?**

ICE programs should identify and clarify the objectives of their program and measure both student and programmatic outcomes. The results of an evaluation provide us with valuable information that can focus the priorities of a program, re-evaluate its objectives, and collect consumer satisfaction. Programs should identify and focus on questions and topics of concern, collect appropriate information, and then analyze and interpret the information for a specific use and purpose.

We use program evaluation to build an understanding of the purpose and outcomes of a program. Other purposes include:

- Providing information for organizational improvements
- Encouraging dialogue among diverse participants
- Providing oversight and compliance
  - Updating a program profile
  - Conducting a cost analysis

Program evaluation allows us to modify existing program components based on student outcomes. For example, if we find that students have limited access to inclusive college experiences, we can begin a dialogue with relevant faculty and administrators.

Program evaluation also allows us to improve the overall quality of the program and identify the costs associated with maintaining it. Both formative assessments and summative assessments allow us to make short-term and long-term evaluations based on the outcomes of a program. Formative assessments are ongoing, and help us to monitor and adjust our work. Summative assessments look at the outcomes of our work.

“Evaluation gives us a process to improve our ways of thinking and, therefore, our ways of developing, implementing, and changing programs and policies.” (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011, chapter 1, p. 31)

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## **Frequently Asked Questions on Program Evaluation**

- (1) Why is evaluation important?
- (2) Who typically does ICE evaluations?
- (3) How do I get started?
- (4) What do I need to measure?
- (5) Do I need to get permission from the university?
- (6) What are some examples of evaluations colleagues doing similar work have used?
- (7) What do people do with the information gathered from evaluations?
- (8) What decisions do people typically make based on the outcomes of evaluations?

### **1. Why is evaluation important?**

Evaluation can be done on two levels for students participating in an ICE partnership. Program evaluation takes into account the features of a program and develops a system for measuring student outcomes. Student evaluation measures how students are progressing due to their involvement in the program.

Because the scope of programs varies greatly, identifying the components of the program that warrant assessment may be one of the most challenging features of evaluation. When considering methods of student evaluation, keep in mind that the materials that students use – from schedules to mentor/mentee agreements – can serve as valuable resources in evaluating student outcomes. Evaluation allows us to justify the purpose of a program, and can be used for five-year evaluation plans required of ICE partnerships.

## **2. Who typically does ICE evaluations?**

The ICE requirements stipulate that partnerships must develop a leadership team that oversees the development, implementation, and ongoing evaluation of the program. Members of this team can include leaders from colleges or universities and local school districts, representatives from adult service agencies, employers, and family members.

These members ensure that policies are created to facilitate the inclusion of students within the program and to identify new partnerships. They also make sure that students', parents', and educators' concerns are validated, and that attention is provided to the progress that students are making within the program.

Other team members, such as an employment specialist, can ensure that students obtain and maintain employment while in the program.

## **3. How do I get started?**

Getting started is one of the hardest steps of the process! The standards developed by Think College can provide team members with ideas about what to assess and what outcomes students outcomes to track. This section will provide information on programmatic areas to focus on and the types of questions that can be asked to collect data on the impact of a program. Here are some examples of tools that can be used to collect programmatic and student-centered information.

### ***Programmatic Information***

Program evaluation tools can collect important information about the results of program participation. Here are some questions that can be considered when developing these types of evaluations:

- Enrollment data: How many students are enrolled per term? What districts are students coming from?
- Academic access: What types of classes are students taking? (e.g., performing arts, English, word processing, etc). How are these courses aligned to the students' career goals and plan of study? Are they taking courses for credit, for audit, or in some other capacity?
- Employment experiences: Where are students working? What do they think of their work experiences? How are work experiences aligned with students' educational, career, and life goals? How do employment
- specialists ensure that students have access to competitive employment? How did the students obtain the job

- Staffing: Does the program provide an adequate number of staff to ensure that student support is individualized? Are staffing hours flexible to allow students to attend activities/employment after school hours? Are program staff meeting regularly to ensure that student/staff needs are being met?

### **Student Information**

- Student planning: How are students being referred to the program? Is person-centered planning being used to identify and address student goals, concerns, and supports prior to entering the program? How are student schedules developed and evaluated?
- Academic access: How do students provide feedback about the classes that they take? How do students communicate that they are interested in continuing their education once they finish the program?
- Employment experiences: Are students in individual paid jobs? Do students receive benefits from employers? How do students communicate their satisfaction with their jobs? Will students be able to retain their job after exiting the program? How are jobs selected for students? Who assists students at their jobs?
- Social life: Are students included in events outside of the classroom? Are students provided opportunities to socialize with peers without disabilities? Are students working with mentors?
- Community/independent living: Are students able to learn independent living skills (e.g., transportation and mobility, financial management)? Are students able to physically navigate around the campus independently or with the assistance of a mentor/educational coach?

Individuals involved in the evaluation process should ensure that evaluation is occurring on a regular basis and includes the input of all involved. Special consideration should be provided to the students themselves. This information can be collected in the form of interviews, surveys, and focus groups, as well as a variety of other formats. Data collection should fit the needs of the program and the students that are in it.

Satisfaction data, or the extent to which students are happy with the program, should be collected to ensure that students are getting the most out of the program. This is especially important for new programs, since team members are not as aware of their role and will require feedback to assess their performance.

Some mechanism for tracking students' exit data, about such things as employment status, academic access, and recreation/leisure activities, is recommended. This information helps to describe the post-school outcomes of participating in college. This will help support the practices implemented by the

ICE grant and help establish funds used to support ICE programs. It also serves as an important communication tool to demonstrate how students are faring after leaving the program, compared with students who did not participate.

Follow-up data should mirror the questions asked at time of exit, and should measure the long-term effects of the dual enrollment program. Questions regarding employment, postsecondary education, and residential status should be included. The advisory team should conduct a review of all the data.

Depending on the results of the review, program changes should be made for areas that have poor outcomes. For example, if students are not maintaining jobs, additional training should be implemented to help create better employment outcomes.

#### **4. Do I need to get permission from the university?**

Whenever someone wants to include people in an evaluation activity, it is important that they review the human subjects research requirements of their university or school. All schools and universities require research conducted on human subjects to undergo evaluation from the institutional review board (IRB). An IRB exists at many institutes of higher education to ensure that proper safeguards are in place to protect human subjects enrolled in research studies. The IRB has the authority to approve, require modifications to, or disapprove research.

Here are some things to know before submitting materials to the IRB:

- What type of review (e.g., expedited, full) will I submit?
- When is the beginning and end date of the project?
- What types of risk(s) will the students be subject to?
- What forms do I need to fill out?
- How many copies are needed of each form?

Knowing this information up front will allow you to add more detail to the application. Other considerations, such as finding out where the office is, who to get in contact with, and talking with others familiar with the process, will assist you in getting IRB approval.

## **6. What are some examples of evaluations colleagues doing similar work have used?**

There are a variety of tools that can be used to evaluate both student and program outcomes. Here are some examples:

- AIR Self-Determination Scale
- The Arc's Self-Determination Scale
- The Goal Attainment Scale (GAS)
- *Informal measures* such as focus groups and surveys

## **7. What do people do with the information gathered from evaluations?**

Once an evaluation is completed, practitioners have a variety of options for communicating the results. Information can be presented at state and national conferences, published in journals, and used to fuel discussions and meetings. Depending on the outcomes of an evaluation, program changes can be made if there are areas that need additional consideration.

## **8. What decisions do people typically make based on the outcomes of evaluations?**

Team members have a number of options when considering the outcomes of an evaluation. Here are a few steps a partnership can take to decide how to use data:

**Step 1:** Reserve a partnership meeting to review and discuss the results.

**Step 2:** Discuss which areas of the evaluation reflect a need for changes in the program.

**Step 3:** Prioritize the areas that are most important and feasible to include in an action plan. Although partnership members may find numerous areas that warrant change, it may not be realistic to address each one.

## **9. Are there any examples of Massachusetts ICE evaluations?**

Yes, one example of an evaluation that was done for ICE is a participatory action research project that was facilitated with students who participated in ICE across the state. Click [here](#) to read Think, Hear, See, Believe College: Students Using Participatory Action Research to Document the College Experience.

